DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 424 068 RC 021 717

AUTHOR Gordon, Sandy; Houghton, Steve; Edwards, Julie
TITLE Effecting Intentional Change in Adventure Programming for "At Risk" Adolescents.
PUB DATE 1998-00-00
NOTE 8p.; In: Exploring the Boundaries of Adventure Therapy: International Perspectives. Proceedings of the International Adventure Therapy Conference (1st, Perth, Australia, July 1997); see RC 021 699.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; *At Risk Persons; *Change; Change Strategies; Cognitive Processes; Cognitive Restructuring; Counseling Techniques; Foreign Countries; Intervention; *Outdoor Education
IDENTIFIERS *Adventure Therapy; Facilitators

ABSTRACT

This paper briefly outlines key aspects of how people change intentionally, some intervention principles, and the effectiveness of typical approaches used by practitioners in outdoor education. The discussion is based in a cognitive-affective and educational perspective that sees education and awareness of thought processes as the key to intentional change. Key aspects of change include: (1) what can be changed (behavior, feelings, thoughts, and wants/needs); (2) timing of change, including stages (precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance); (3) process of change that involves how it occurs and whether or not prerequisites are necessary; and (4) resistance to change (barriers and obstacles). Practitioners can help others change by clarifying options, providing information and skills, exploring barriers and resistance, and supporting change efforts. Recommendations for outdoor practitioners working with delinquent and at-risk adolescents include providing challenging physical goals with immediate gratification, ongoing evaluation, use of "teachable moments," recognition of achievements, and tailoring of change activities to readiness of participants. (Contains 19 references.) (SAS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
B.A. Baker
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

26

ED 424 068

Effecting Intentional Change in Adventure Programming for "At Risk" Adolescents

By Sandy Gordon, Steve Houghton, & Julie Edwards

Introduction

Much of the present article was stimulated by Dr. Burton Giges's (1995)[1] Intervention/Performance Enhancement keynote address entitled "How People Change" at the 10th Annual Conference of the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) in New Orleans. In that presentation Giges, who has had careers in medical research, medical practice, psychiatry and psychology, provided illustrations and practical advice for sport and exercise psychologists who, similar to outdoor and adventure educators, formally engage clients (individuals and teams/groups) in effecting change. The purposes of this article are to provide brief outlines of the key aspects of how people change, and some essential intervention principles, with some reflections on the effectiveness of typical approaches currently used by practitioners in outdoor education. To conclude, some tentative recommendations for practice will be provided.

It is important at the outset, however, to make two preliminary points. First, this article concerns efforts at "intentional change" as opposed to change that may occur naturally due to maturation or development, or due to external or environmental factors. Second, the perspective used and advocated, but not formally presented here, is cognitive-affective and educational. Thinking, therefore, is understood to be the main source of feelings and also provides significance to emotions, which are important links between thoughts and behaviour. Consequently, the key to effecting behavioural change is education and awareness of thought or appraisal processes as they relate to situations in which individuals seeking change find themselves.

Key Aspects of Change and Intervention Principles

Giges (1995) and others (e.g., Heatherton & Weinberger, 1994; Ravizza, 1993; Seligman, 1993) have identified four aspects of intentional change: content, timing,

[1] Requests for copies of this address can be sent to the first author: Department of Human Movement, The University of Western Australia, Nedlands, WA 6907

RC 021717

process, resistance; and four key intervention principles that outdoor educators might consider when designing intervention programs.

Content of change.

This first aspect concerns *what* can be changed. Usually we think of four major categories: behaviour, feelings, thoughts and wants/needs. However, within each of these broad categories, many specific examples emerge; for example, awareness, expectations, habits, values, goals, viewpoints, attitudes, opinions, judgements, intentions, choices, decisions, beliefs, directions, and commitment (Giges, 1995). Furthermore, the *importance* attached to any of these examples can also be changed (e.g,. the importance or significance of being a young drug user), as can the significance of "beginnings" of change (e.g., change in attitude or viewpoint regarding drug use) which may go unnoticed if the focus remains solely on behaviour. *What* can be changed must, therefore, be "controllable" but the effects or content of change may be either covert (feelings, thoughts, wants/needs), overt (behaviour) or both.

There arises an important question for educators and this pertains to the willingness or commitment of an individual to change. It has been suggested that adolescents who do not achieve or who are unlikely to achieve year 12 status in school because of truancy, disruptive behaviour, delinquency and/or school failure become marginalised and consequently at risk of adverse psychological, social, and health consequences (Western Australian Legislative Assembly, 1992). Recent research has demonstrated that many "at risk" adolescents actually set goals related to participation in such disruptive and risk taking behaviours to establish and consequently maintain non-conforming reputations (Carroll, 1995; Carroll, Durkin, Hattie, & Houghton, 1995; Houghton & Carroll, in press; Odgers, Houghton, & Douglas, in press). These reputations change over time according to the importance attached to them at a given time (Houghton & Carroll, 1995). It should be noted that this change is particularly strong when adolescents participate in activities on a voluntary basis. The issues of commitment to and directionality of change, particularly related to "at risk" youth, will appear throughout this paper.

Timing of change.

This second aspect concerns questions like "When is change most likely?" and "Does it occur in some sequential pattern?" One approach to understanding when and how people change has been provided by the Transtheoretical Model (TM) of behaviour change, which was originally developed to explain or predict change in addictive behaviours (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). The TM, however, has also been applied to cessation of unhealthy behaviours such as smoking (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983) and over-eating (O'Connell & Velicer, 1988), and the adoption of healthy behaviours such as exercise (Gorely & Gordon, 1995). The model suggests that when people intentionally change behaviour they do not do it in a single step but go through a series of "stages of change." These stages have been identified as precontemplation (no thought of or intention to change), contemplation (thinking about changing sometime in the future), preparation (making occasional small changes), action (actually participating in the new behaviour), and maintenance (having sustained the new behaviour for more than six months). Research on the model has also identified those different strategies and techniques used by people vary from stage to stage, as do other cognitive characteristics

such as self-efficacy and balanced decision-making. Particularly significant to the purposes of this paper, the TM also considers an individual's "readiness to change" and the importance of matching the appropriateness and timing of interventions to her/his stage of readiness.

Carroll, Durkin, Hattie and Houghton (1996) have demonstrated that adolescents at risk and incarcerated youth set themselves rehabilitative goals post 16 years of age and that prior to this many of their self-set goals tend to be physical activity goals and power, autonomy and freedom oriented type goals. Outdoor and adventure education, therefore, presents to these populations at an optimal time in their lives the appropriate time to effect change and achieve these goals in more prosocial ways. In a Wilderness type programme involving young repeat offenders, Houghton, Carroll and Shier (in press) found that participants were more highly committed to physically challenging goals and hence susceptible to and "ready" for behaviour change. Indeed, the more physically challenging a goal (e.g., night time navigation, crossing a ravine by rope) the greater the degree of attention and subsequent success. However, are all participants in outdoor and adventure education programs "ready" for change?

Process of change.

The third aspect concerns *how* change occurs and whether or not pre-requisites are necessary. Curtis and Stricker (1991) consider part of making a change is a willingness to be changed. However, Giges (1995) pointed out that, in addition to wanting to change, individuals must realise that change is both an active and passive process. Not only do individuals have to do something; they must also allow something to happen to them. When presented with new information, which challenges their existing belief systems and learning, how much discomfort do our programme participants experience or allow? The process of change, therefore, involves a willingness to experience discomfort and "the unfamiliar," and to those wishing to avoid such emotional discomfort, change will likely be difficult. Perhaps the important point here for practitioners is that, while we can never prepare clients fully for new information and change, we can certainly prepare them better for the processes associated with change.

It is important to understand at this point that many high school adolescents experience failure and that, for many, this has been an on-going process since primary school. Consequently, such individuals do not wish to change to what we would term more appropriate prosocial type activities/behaviour. Rather, as shown by Houghton and Carroll (in press), disruptive school students use the discomfort they suffer from teacher and school discipline systems as a positive reinforcer to enhance their reputations and status among peers. At present this is the only way in which these students can be successful. Moreover, this process of reputation enhancement is well established by grade five of the primary school level (Carroll, Houghton, & Bryant, 1996). Therefore, we believe outdoor and adventure education, while being an ideal vehicle for children and adolescents at risk, may also be beneficial if introduced at an earlier age, ideally pre grade five level. In doing so we may facilitate a willingness to change and also make the unfamiliar more familiar, and hence more acceptable.

Resistance to change.

This final aspect concerns the barriers and obstacles to change and what inhibits, interferes with or discourages change. Often resistance stems from the feeling or anticipation of "loss" associated with losing familiar ways of behaving or responding or relating to others. Similarly, change is often resisted because it is "unnatural" or inconsistent with our identity or nature. Giges (1995) argues that our identity is only the habits, attitudes and choices that have become familiar to us. As a consequence, the key element to change is understanding that current perceptions of the self need not be permanent unless we decide that they should be so. Certainly change can represent a threat to one's self-esteem. If the change occurs too quickly, to an extreme degree or if the responsibility for it is attributed to others (e.g. school teachers, outdoor practitioners/programmers), "resistance will be all we are left with that is ours" (Giges, 1995, p. 10). In each of these cases resistance will quite likely be further intensified. Typical resisting thoughts include "change is not important to me," "even if this does work, it won't last." Prominent feelings associated with resistance include fear (fear of failure or criticism or inadequacy) anger (rebellion, defiance, retaliation - because the change initiative belongs to someone else) and guilt (shame if an unpleasant trait is revealed, or if someone else gets hurt).

The nature of change in itself often acts as the barrier. Consistent with Giges' (1995) argument, Carroll, Houghton, Hattie and Durkin (1996) and Odgers, Houghton and Douglas (in press) demonstrated that reputation is the most powerful factor affecting change. Of 23 variables investigated by these authors, 13 have been significant, and of those, 9 have been reputational variables. Furthermore, the variables comprising non-conforming reputation were the most significant. Why would an individual with a "bad" (in this case bad equates to good) reputation wish to change? The barriers to effecting change among adolescents often revolve around the nature of the activities and the interaction that takes place between the various clients and educators. Activities need to be commensurate with the type of image or reputation an individual is attempting to establish or maintain. The question is how can outdoor education facilitate this? That it can is evident (Crane, Hattie, & Houghton, 1996). What is now required is rigorous research to determine the processes that function in this.

One process common to outdoor education is verbal (and non-verbal) interaction between participants. This is particularly important for delinquents and adolescents at risk (Houghton, Carroll, & Shier, in press). Time to talk, usually around the camp fire at the end of a day, not only permits a time for discussion of the day's events/problems, but also provides opportunities to reflect on changing attitudes and reputations through more appropriate challenging prosocial activities.

Finally, Giges (1995) addresses the question: *How can practitioners help others change?* He believes that the guiding principles of intervention design and practice, or the essence of what we can do to help others change, can be expressed in four words: clarify, inform, explore and support. Briefly, clarify means helping others become more aware of the reasons to change (or not to) and more aware of the options, alternatives, choices and their consequences or outcomes. Inform means providing information and skills about dealing with unfamiliar and unpleasant experiences, emotions and thinking patterns associated with change. Exploration means facilitating an examination of resistance or "why not" issues, barriers and obstacles and, in particular, investigating the extent of

unpleasant feelings such as resentment, sadness and fear which interfere with change. Finally, support refers to what is said and what is done to encourage individuals to persevere with the change process. Support techniques include listening without judgement, highlighting and celebrating "beginnings", acknowledging frustration, and inspiring courage to face and tolerate fears.

Giges' (1995) assertion that we can help others change by clarifying, informing, exploring and supporting fits particularly well with outdoor education and delinquents and adolescents at risk. These individuals cite the initial point of interaction between themselves and others as that which determines how they will respond (Houghton, Carroll, & Shier, in press). In the majority of instances the response is instantaneous and characterised by aggression. Outdoor and adventure education facilitates cooperation and collaborative problem solving between individuals and groups, which encourages individuals to listen, analyse information and choose the appropriate response option.

Implications and Recommendations for Practitioners

Recent outdoor and adventure type programmes such as that evaluated by Houghton, Carroll and Shier (in press) provide evidence of their suitability for delinquents and adolescents at risk. Such programmes fulfil their needs in terms of providing challenging physical goals, immediate gratification and hence success and, through this, the opportunity to develop more prosocial conforming reputations. What we need to ensure is that the benefits of outdoor and adventure programmes outweigh the consequences and that individuals have the opportunity to continue their participation. However, many adolescents attend a programme and then return to their community where the naturally occurring reinforcers are stronger. An analogy with smoking might be appropriate. Although people are initially able to stop smoking, relapse rates are very high. Principles of learning theory have been applied to the smoking problem without an effective understanding of smoking itself. To change smoking behaviour one must understand the dimensions of the underlying behaviour: its frequency, its association with external stimuli, its developmental course, its addictive component and the psychological needs that it meets. With this understanding we must then transport our interventions/programmes out of the "office" to environments in which our target groups are found. Outdoor and adventure education programmes provide the opportunity for this.

Second, many programmes concerned with behaviour change tend to focus on the final outcome. In other words, a "post course score" is produced by which change is evaluated. With adolescents at risk, however, change tends to be in small increments and in a diversity of skills and behaviours. Therefore, evaluations should be on going and include both personal and external assessments of attitudinal change as well as observable behaviour change. In addition, to facilitate change, appropriate positive reinforcements are necessary at "teachable moments" and should be delivered when small incremental improvements in specified items occur.

Third, during the change process all achievements must be recognised, praised, and reinforced. Honest and open communication must also be encouraged and supported and this is best facilitated through debriefing processes, which draw out participants' feelings before, during and after, and particularly the behavioural and affective sequelae of each activity. Framing and frontloading the experiences (Priest & Gass, 1993) will also help

translate these changes to "real life," and foster the transfer of coping strategies to everyday situations.

Finally, change activities must be tailored to stage(s) of "readiness for change" of the participants. Experienced practitioners typically agree that time and efforts are often wasted on participants who either "don't know why they are there" or "don't want to be there" (or both) and are simply not ready to change. However, if programs are designed to match participant "readiness to change" mutual progress and benefits will be more likely. One of the keys seems to be in explaining "what's in it for them." Once the benefits of change to them directly are articulated, participants seem more likely respond to the cognitive and behavioural challenges ahead in the change process.

While B. Giges (personal communication, November 30th, 1995) firmly believes in the potential of outdoor and adventure programming for effecting meaningful and prosocial change in different populations (as do the authors of this article), his view is one of personal opinion. This article, however, has provided evidence from empirical evaluations of adventure type programs and also from research with a population (at risk youth) with whom we believe these programs might prove beneficial. Hopefully, therefore, by stimulating both discussions among practitioners from different working populations and with some personal reflection about professional practice, this article will promote efforts and interventions that can help realise this potential.

References

Carroll, A. (1995). Characterising the goals of juvenile delinquents: Nature, content, and purpose. *Psychology, Crime, and Law, 1*(4), 1-14.

Carroll, A., Durkin, K., Hattie, J. & Houghton, S. (1996). A comparison of goals and factors of reputation among young offenders and at-risk and not at-risk adolescents. Submitted to *The Journal of Educational Psychology*.

Carroll, A., Houghton, S., & Bryant, D. (1996). Goal setting among at-risk and not at-risk primary school aged children. (Manuscript in preparation).

Crane, D., Hattie, J., & Houghton, S. (in press). Goal setting and the Adventure experience. *The Australian Journal of Psychology.*

Curtis, R. C., & Stricker, G. (Eds.) (1991). *How people change: Inside and outside therapy.* New York: Plenum.

Giges, B. (1995, October). *How People Change.* Keynote address at the 10th Annual Conference of the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology, New Orleans, LA.

Gorely, T. & Gordon, S. (1995). An examination of the Transtheoretical Model and exercise behaviour in older adults. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 17,* 312-324.

Heatherton, T., & Weinberger, J. (Eds.) (1994). *Can personality change?* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Houghton, S. & Carroll, A. (1995). Assessing adolescent goals and reputations over time. Small Australian Research Council grant.

Houghton, S. & Carroll, A. (In press). Enhancing Reputations: High School Adolescent Males' Effective Use of Teacher Behaviour Intervention Strategies. *Scientia Experimentalis Pedagogica*

Houghton, S., Carroll, A., & Shier, J. (In press). A Wilderness program for young offenders in Western Australia. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation.*

O'Connell, D. & Velicer, N. F. (1988). A decisional balance measure and the stages of change model for weight loss. *The International Journal of Addictions, 23,* 729-750.

Odgers, P., Houghton, S., & Douglas, G. (In press). Reputation enhancement and adolescent substance use. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry.*

Priest, S., & Gass, M. (1993). Five generations of facilitated learning from adventure experiences. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership, 10* (3), 23-25.

Prochaska, J. O., & DiClemente, C. E. (1983). Stages and processes of self-change of smoking: Toward an integrative model of change. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 51,* 390-395.

Prochaska, J. O., DiClemente, C. E., & Norcross, J. C. (1992). In search of how people change: Applications to addictive behaviours. *American Psychology Journal, 47,* 1102-1114.

Ravizza, K. (1993). Increasing awareness for sport performance. In J. M. Williams (Ed.) *Applied sport psychology: Personal growth to peak performance.* (pp. 148-157). London: Mayfield

Seligman, M. E. P. (1993). *What you can change and what you can't.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf

Western Australia Legislative Assembly (1992). *The final report of the select committee on youth affairs.* Perth: Office of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.